

Our views: A greener future

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Senate should OK energy bill that could boost Brevard, Florida economies

Our nation has lacked a coherent energy policy far too long, worsening America's addiction to foreign oil and preventing the development of new energy sources that can create 21st-century jobs and industries.

Congress is poised to change that with the House's recent passage of the American Clean Energy and Security Act, better known as cap-and-trade, that would cut the greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change and spur alternative energy production.

The Senate should now follow suit and make the measure law, opening the doors for the increased production of solar, wind, biomass and nuclear power that could boost the Florida and Brevard County economies.

That could be especially important at Kennedy Space Center, where Florida Power and Light Co. is building a solar plant that could help turn the spaceport into a hub for more solar work and replace some of the thousands of jobs lost when the shuttle fleet retires next year.

Likewise, Florida is poised for green industries to take off.

A Pew Charitable Trusts study last month said the state's clean energy economy grew 7.9 percent between 1998 and 2007, creating more than 30,000 jobs and 3,800 industries. That puts Florida among the top 10 states for green jobs

with annual incomes ranging from \$21,000 to \$111,000.

The bill is not perfect. Still, it's key provisions would:

- Create a cap-and-trade system to cut carbon emissions by 17 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050, the minimum amount that scientists say is necessary to prevent the worst consequences from climate change.

- Require utilities to meet 20 percent of their demand for electricity through renewable sources and efficiency by 2020.

- Mandate new energy-saving standards for buildings, appliances and industries, and investments in clean-energy technologies.

Much of the House debate focused on the measure's cost, with some Republicans claiming an MIT analysis showed electricity bills would rise as high as \$3,100 a year per family.

But the author of the MIT study has called that a gross distortion and "wrong in so many ways it's hard to begin," adding the actual cost would be about \$80 per family in 2015.

Meanwhile, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated the bill would cost the average household \$175 per year in higher energy costs by 2020. It also said because of rebates, utility bills in the lowest-income homes would actually fall \$40 a year by 2020.

The Environmental Protection Agency reached a similar finding, citing an average cost to a household of \$80 to \$111 in 2020 — about 10 cents a day per person per day. It further noted that utility bills would be about 7 percent lower in 2020 because of efficiency provisions in the law.

The Space Coast's two House members took opposite sides on the measure, with Democrat Suzanne Kosmas getting it right by supporting the bill and Republican Bill Posey getting it wrong by opposing it.

The pending Senate debate comes on the heels of a new report from federal scientists who said man-made climate change is boosting temperatures, increasing heat waves and rainfall and raising sea levels around the U.S. And that it will get much worse this century — with Florida hit hard — unless global emissions are significantly cut.

That makes it imperative the Senate not weaken the hard-won House compromise and approve the measure, which deserves the full support of Florida Sens. Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez.

The time for action — at long last — is now.